

Similarities and Differences of W. E. B. Du Bois and Marcus Garvey Political Ideas

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In the early twentieth century, African Americans continued to confront segregation, disfranchisement, racial violence, economic inequality, and exclusion from educational and political institutions. W. E. B. Du Bois and Marcus Garvey became two of the most influential Black political leaders of this period. Both demanded dignity, collective organization, and a future beyond white supremacy, but they disagreed sharply about leadership, integration, nationalism, class, and the relationship between African Americans and Africa. The original essay focuses on these similarities and differences and correctly recognizes that their distinct backgrounds shaped their political ideas (Lewis, 1993; Martin, 1976).

Du Bois was an American scholar, writer, sociologist, and activist who helped establish the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Garvey was a Jamaican-born organizer who founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League and built a mass Pan-African movement. Du Bois often pursued civil rights through education, legal reform, political protest, journalism, and interracial cooperation. Garvey emphasized Black pride, economic independence, international unity, and the development of institutions controlled by Black people. Their conflict was intense, yet both contributed ideas that continued to influence later civil-rights, Black-nationalist, and Pan-African movements (Ewing, 2014).

Different Backgrounds

The original essay explains that different social backgrounds influenced Du Bois and Garvey. Du Bois was born in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, in 1868. He did not come from a nationally powerful or wealthy family, but he grew up in a northern community where he had access to education and experienced a social environment different from the violent segregation of the South. He studied at Fisk University, Harvard University, and the University of Berlin and became one of the first African Americans to earn a doctorate from Harvard. His academic training shaped his belief that careful research, political argument, and educated leadership could expose racial injustice and organize reform (Lewis, 1993).

Garvey was born in St. Ann's Bay, Jamaica, in 1887. His family had limited resources, and his formal schooling ended earlier than Du Bois's, but he developed skills through printing, work, reading, travel, and political organizing. Experiences in the Caribbean, Central America, and London exposed him to colonial inequality, labor exploitation, and the global condition of African-descended people. When he founded the UNIA in Jamaica in 1914 and later expanded it in the United States, he addressed workers and migrants who often felt ignored by elite civil-rights organizations (Ewing, 2014; Martin, 1976).

These backgrounds did not determine every position mechanically, but they influenced political style. Du Bois wrote through scholarly and organizational institutions and often appealed to courts, policymakers, and educated leadership. Garvey used mass meetings, newspapers, uniforms, parades, business projects, and emotionally powerful speeches to create a broad popular movement. Du Bois saw Garvey's methods as dangerous and unrealistic, while Garvey viewed Du Bois and other established leaders as elitist and dependent on white approval.

Du Bois and the Talented Tenth

The original essay identifies Du Bois with the "Talented Tenth," the idea that highly educated Black leaders could guide racial advancement. In his early writing, Du Bois argued that access to advanced education was essential because a community needed teachers, professionals, writers, political leaders, and scholars capable of challenging inequality. This position responded partly to Booker T. Washington's emphasis on industrial education and gradual economic advancement. Du Bois feared that limiting Black education to vocational preparation would accept permanent political and intellectual subordination (Du Bois, 1903).

The Talented Tenth concept has been criticized for elitism. It can imply that progress should be led mainly by a small educated class and may underestimate the political intelligence and contribution of workers, farmers, domestic laborers, and poor communities. The original essay is correct that Garvey attracted many people who felt alienated from elite leadership. However, Du Bois's position changed over time, and his broader work did not concern only upper-class African Americans. His sociological research examined poverty and labor, and his journalism addressed lynching, colonialism, voting rights, and economic injustice affecting the wider Black population.

Garvey's Mass Movement

Garvey's UNIA became one of the largest mass organizations in Black history. Its message of "Africa for the Africans," Black pride, self-reliance, and international unity appealed to people who experienced daily humiliation and limited opportunity. Garvey told Black audiences that they did not need to wait for white society to recognize their value. They could build businesses, schools, newspapers, political organizations, and global connections of their own (Garvey, 1986; Martin, 1976).

The movement used symbols and public ceremony to transform identity. Uniforms, flags, titles, conventions, and parades created a sense of collective power. Garvey's newspaper, *Negro World*, circulated internationally and connected communities across the Americas, Africa, and Europe. His economic projects, including the Black Star Line, were intended to demonstrate Black commercial independence and create links across the African diaspora.

The Black Star Line experienced severe financial and management problems, and Garvey was later convicted of mail fraud in a case that supporters viewed as politically motivated. The failure of

particular businesses does not erase the movement's influence. Garveyism showed that a large working-class audience could be mobilized around global Black identity and economic control (Ewing, 2014).

The NAACP and Civil-Rights Strategy

Du Bois helped found the NAACP in 1909 and became director of publicity and research. He edited *The Crisis*, the organization's magazine, using it to report racial violence, promote Black art and literature, support political protest, and reach readers across the country. The original essay correctly identifies the magazine as one of his most important tools. Through essays, photographs, reports, and editorials, Du Bois connected individual incidents with the national structure of racism (Lewis, 1993).

The NAACP pursued legal challenges, federal anti-lynching action, voting rights, and equal access to education and public life. It involved Black and white members, which reflected Du Bois's willingness to cooperate across race when such cooperation supported equality. Garvey distrusted this approach because white participation could preserve control by outsiders. Du Bois believed that interracial organization was acceptable if it challenged white supremacy rather than demanding Black submission.

Integration and Separation

The strongest difference between Du Bois and Garvey concerned integration and separation. Du Bois generally demanded full citizenship and equal rights within the United States. He rejected the idea that African Americans should accept segregation or abandon claims to American institutions. Political participation, legal protection, education, and social equality were rights rather than favors (Du Bois, 1903).

Garvey argued that white racism was too deeply established for integration to provide genuine freedom. He therefore promoted Black-controlled institutions and, at times, territorial separation or migration to Africa. The original essay describes this as the Back-to-Africa movement. Garvey did not expect every African American simply to board a ship immediately. Africa functioned as a political center and symbol of sovereignty. He imagined a strong African continent capable of protecting people of African descent globally (Garvey, 1986).

This difference created bitter conflict. Du Bois believed that Garvey's separatism could strengthen white segregationists by accepting racial division. Garvey accused integrationist leaders of seeking acceptance from a society that had repeatedly rejected Black equality. Their disagreement concerned both practical strategy and the meaning of freedom.

Pan-Africanism

Despite conflict, both men were Pan-Africanists. They understood that the problems facing African Americans were connected with colonialism and racial hierarchy across the world. Garvey's Pan-Africanism emphasized mass racial unity, economic power, and African sovereignty. Du Bois organized Pan-African congresses and used scholarship and diplomacy to oppose colonial rule (Ewing, 2014; Lewis, 1993).

Their forms of Pan-Africanism differed. Garvey's movement used a strong racial-nationalist language and built popular identification with Africa. Du Bois often worked through conferences of intellectuals, activists, and political representatives and later became increasingly critical of capitalism and imperialism. Both helped create a global political imagination in which Black freedom could not be limited to one country.

Economic Independence

Garvey placed economic independence at the center of liberation. He argued that a people without businesses, industry, transportation, and control of capital would remain dependent. UNIA projects were intended to circulate money within Black communities and create international commercial links. The emotional power of this message came from daily discrimination in employment, banking, housing, and commerce (Garvey, 1986; Martin, 1976).

Du Bois also recognized economic inequality but was more skeptical of Garvey's business claims and management. Over time, Du Bois developed stronger support for cooperative economics and criticized capitalism's relationship with racial exploitation. Their difference was therefore not that one cared about economics and the other did not. Garvey emphasized entrepreneurial racial self-reliance and institution building, while Du Bois increasingly connected racial justice with structural economic reform.

Relationship With White Allies

The original essay states that Du Bois worked with liberal white people while Garvey later realized some cooperation was necessary. The issue was more complicated. Du Bois accepted interracial collaboration but criticized white paternalism and insisted that Black people must speak for themselves. He did not believe white allies should control the movement. Garvey emphasized independent Black leadership and often treated interracial reform organizations with suspicion.

Garvey also met with white segregationists, including leaders of the Ku Klux Klan, because they shared a belief in racial separation, though for completely different reasons. This decision outraged Du Bois and many other Black leaders. Garvey argued that open segregationists were more honest

than white liberals who promised equality without delivering it. Critics responded that cooperation with violent racists endangered Black communities and gave legitimacy to white supremacy. The episode demonstrates how far the strategic conflict extended (Martin, 1976).

Booker T. Washington and the Atlanta Compromise

The original essay states that both leaders opposed Booker T. Washington's Atlanta Exposition position. Du Bois clearly criticized Washington's willingness to postpone demands for political rights and higher education in exchange for economic opportunity. Garvey's relationship with Washington's legacy was more mixed. He admired Washington's emphasis on institution building and economic self-help while developing a more nationalist and international movement.

Both Du Bois and Garvey rejected permanent Black inferiority. Neither believed African Americans should remain satisfied with second-class status. However, Garvey shared more of Washington's interest in economic organization, while Du Bois emphasized immediate civil and political rights. Their political ideas cannot be reduced to a simple united opposition.

Class and Political Audience

Class shaped the movements' audiences and language. The NAACP included professionals, intellectuals, ministers, and middle-class reformers, though its legal work affected people across classes. Garvey's UNIA reached large numbers of workers, migrants, domestic laborers, and people excluded from elite institutions. Its message transformed experiences of poverty and racial humiliation into collective pride (Ewing, 2014).

Garvey's popularity challenged established leaders who believed political strategy required respectability and careful negotiation. Du Bois worried that emotional mass mobilization without sound administration could mislead supporters. Garvey believed elite caution weakened the struggle. Both concerns contained truth: movements need popular energy, but they also need accountable organization and practical strategy.

Gender and Leadership

Women played major roles in both civil-rights and Garveyite organizations, although leadership histories often focus on famous men. The UNIA created opportunities for women organizers, journalists, nurses, and local leaders, even while some of its ideology used traditional gender roles. The NAACP also depended on women activists who organized branches, investigated violence, raised funds, and led campaigns.

Examining gender complicates the image of two male leaders directing passive communities. Their

movements were networks of local activism, and women frequently sustained the daily work. Political ideas were interpreted and changed by members rather than simply transmitted from the top.

Similarities

Du Bois and Garvey shared several fundamental beliefs. Both rejected white supremacy and the demand that Black people accept permanent inferiority. Both built organizations and used publications to educate and mobilize. Both connected African-American struggles with the broader African diaspora. Both believed that racial pride and historical knowledge were necessary for political action. They also inspired later generations to demand equality, self-determination, and institutional power.

Their organizations created communities in which Black identity could be expressed positively. *The Crisis* and *Negro World* circulated ideas, art, history, and political news. Each leader understood that control of communication was essential because mainstream institutions often misrepresented or ignored Black life.

Differences

The major differences involved integration, nationalism, class, leadership, and tactics. Du Bois pursued equal citizenship through legal challenge, protest, education, and interracial organization. Garvey promoted mass nationalism, economic self-reliance, separation, and African sovereignty. Du Bois often placed educated leadership at the center, while Garvey built a broader working-class following. Du Bois criticized Garvey's business practices and meetings with segregationists; Garvey attacked Du Bois as elitist and insufficiently committed to independent Black power.

These differences were not merely personal hostility. They represented enduring strategic questions: Should oppressed people transform existing institutions or build separate ones? Can alliances with members of a dominant group support liberation, or do they preserve dependency? Should leadership come from trained experts or mass participation? Later movements continued debating these questions.

Influence on Later Movements

The original essay correctly concludes that both men influenced later generations. Du Bois's work contributed to civil-rights litigation, Black scholarship, Pan-Africanism, anti-colonial politics, and demands for higher education and voting rights. Garvey's message influenced Black nationalism, Rastafari, African independence movements, and leaders who emphasized racial pride and economic control. Malcolm X's family, for example, was connected with Garveyite organizing (Ewing, 2014).

The civil-rights and Black Power movements inherited elements from both. Integrationist campaigns reflected Du Bois's demand for equal citizenship, while community control and Black pride echoed Garvey. Their legacies should therefore be understood as competing but overlapping sources of twentieth-century Black politics.

Conclusion

W. E. B. Du Bois and Marcus Garvey were committed to overcoming racial oppression, but their political ideas differed substantially. Du Bois emphasized education, civil rights, legal reform, scholarly analysis, and interracial cooperation under Black leadership. Garvey emphasized mass organization, Black nationalism, economic independence, and global African unity. Their backgrounds and audiences shaped these positions.

Despite conflict, both rejected the idea that Black people should accept second-class status. Both created organizations, publications, and international networks that expanded political possibility. Their debate remains important because movements still confront the tension between integration and autonomy, elite expertise and mass leadership, reform and separation, and alliances and self-reliance. Understanding both thinkers provides a fuller account of the struggle for Black freedom.

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